

G1029

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT TITLE: SOUTH YUBA RIVER COORDINATED WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN
APPLICANT NAME: California Department of Parks & Recreation - Gold Mines Sector, LEAD AGENCY
Bureau of Land Management - Folsom Field Office
Tahoe National Forest - Nevada City Ranger District

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Building on the existing spirit of cooperation among local, state and federal government agencies and community-based groups working on resource issues in the Yuba River watershed, the South Yuba River Coordinated Watershed Management Plan project proposes to begin the process of developing a coordinated management plan for the 40 miles of South Yuba River between Spaulding and Englebright reservoirs, with the goal of bringing public and private entities together to establish and maintain a healthy watershed for local users and downstream beneficiaries. The South Yuba is a tributary to the Sacramento River watershed within the Feather River/Sutter Basin Ecological Zone.

The overall project is designed to define the problem, identify goals and objectives based on assessment results, and develop a coordinated management, implementation, and monitoring plan to meet the watershed health goals and objectives. The phased approach, to be completed over a 5- to 7-year period, leads to a process of adaptive management for the Yuba River – testing alternatives to meet objectives and developing or adapting future management actions on both public and private lands based on monitoring.

The South Yuba River already supports a high level of recreational use, which has a direct impact on the health of the watershed in terms of sedimentation inputs, human waste disposal (fecal coliform), and human-caused wildfire potential. But before specific management actions can be taken to address these and other issues, agencies and interested stakeholders need reliable data upon which to base decisions.

Therefore, project proponents are seeking funding from the CALFED Bay-Delta Program specifically to 1.) design and complete an inventory of existing information and conduct comprehensive survey research regarding recreation uses, public-private use conflicts and their respective impacts on the South Yuba River, and 2.) establish and formalize a South Yuba River Stewardship Council as a subcommittee of an existing group of agency, community and environmental representatives involved in watershed issues.

Research on other critical areas, including water quality, fire and fuels management, road building and maintenance, forest practices, mining impacts and water operations, is included in a separate proposal to the Proposition 204 Delta Tributary Watershed Program. Taken together, this baseline information will complete Phase I of an overall watershed planning and implementation process for the South Yuba River.

This project helps meet the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan goals of improving upper watershed health and restoring ecological processes in the upper watersheds by addressing ecosystem quality objectives (improve and increase aquatic and terrestrial habitats and improve ecological functions in Bay-Delta systems) and water quality objectives (provide good quality water for all beneficial uses).

APPROACH/TASKS:

Activities focus on data gathering needed to assess the impacts of recreation use and public-private use conflicts on watershed health in the South Yuba. Tasks include: project start-up (agency MOA, contract with CALFED, start-up of South Yuba River Stewardship Council), project management (stakeholder outreach/communications, inter-agency coordination, grant/project administration), development of survey instruments (contract, literature review, issues scoping, pre-sampling), field sampling (surveyor training, survey process, follow-up), and data analysis (raw data compilation, results analysis, conclusions). Project start-up and survey development will be completed in the first year. Field sampling will take place over 18 months to accumulate data across all seasons and weather conditions.

Data will be analyzed in the last six months, with a final report for presentation by the end of the three-year period. Project management and administration will occur throughout the life of the project.

JUSTIFICATION FOR PROJECT AND FUNDING BY CALFED:

This project helps meet CALFED's ERPP goals of identifying and reversing the fundamental causes of decline in fish and wildlife populations in the Bay-Delta by launching a locally based, coordinated watershed assessment and planning process in one of the tributary watersheds (Programmatic Action 1C under the Upper Watershed Processes Implementation Objective for the Feather River/Sutter Basin Ecological Zone Vision). The project follows the Bay-Delta program's strategy of adaptive management, which relies on the identification of indicators of ecosystem health, comprehensive monitoring to measure improvement over time, focused research and phasing of actions. And it capitalizes on existing cooperative efforts between local/state/federal managing agencies and the local community.

The need for such an assessment and planning process on the South Yuba River is heightened by the fact that: a.) both the EPA Index of Watershed Indicators and the SNEP Report's Index of Biotic Integrity rank the South Yuba medium to low in terms of water quality and ecosystem health; b.) management of the river currently falls under at least six different jurisdictions, from local government and water agencies to federal and state agencies, leading to the potential for fragmented and disjointed management of the resource; and c.) conflicts continue to grow as population and resulting demands on the resource increase.

BUDGET COSTS AND THIRD PARTY IMPACTS:

Costs include: \$80,400 for project start-up and management over three years, \$25,000 for survey, \$133,600 for field sampling, and \$25,000 for data analysis, for a total of \$264,000 requested from CALFED. Costs of facilitating full community involvement and required reporting for CALFED are included. Since the proposed work involves neither ground-disturbing activities nor decision-making, there are no CEQA/NEPA requirements to be met under this proposal. Cost sharing by the MOA agencies includes a combined total of \$93,000 over three years for supervisory and oversight tasks and technical assistance. There are no third-party impacts as defined by the CALFED PSP.

APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

The applicants for this project include two federal and one state agency. Together, the principal project managers from the three agencies have 72 years' experience in land management and planning.

MONITORING AND DATA EVALUATION

Data collection techniques will be monitored and evaluated by the principal project managers or their assistants and all data collected under this proposal will be analyzed and used for future planning, decision-making and land use allocation in the South Yuba River watershed.

LOCAL SUPPORT/COORDINATION WITH OTHER PROGRAMS/COMPATIBILITY W/CALFED OBJECTIVES

This project has the support of the Nevada County Proposition 204 Steering Committee, a group of agencies and community organizations involved in local watershed issues. It also completes a series of critical assessment studies on water quality and watershed health proposed under a Proposition 204 funding request by the Nevada County Proposition 204 Steering Committee. This project also augments other South Yuba watershed proposals being submitted to CALFED, including a fuels management outreach/education program by the NCRS and a study of Englebright Dam removal on the lower Yuba. Assessment and planning in this particular upper watershed are especially critical in conjunction with the Englebright study, since removal of Englebright Dam would open up 40 miles of habitat and spawning grounds in the South Yuba for priority species. Our research also complements a watershed health project already funded by Proposition 204 for Yuba County and the lower Yuba watershed and would add valuable information to the EPA's new Unified Watershed Assessment effort.